Cody urges longer school days, years

By DOUG MYERS
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Louisiana must go to longer school days and school years to keep up with the ever-increasing need for trained workers and educated manpower, Education Superintendent Wilmer Cody said Monday.

Speaking to the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives, Cody predicted that teacher pay hikes next year will be linked to increasing the school year. Cody said the Department of Education tried to lengthen the current 180-day school year during the recently ended legislative session, but lawmakers would not go along with the idea.

Cody said he would recommend that very young children who are likely candidates to have problems in school — "at risk" children — should be put in school at a very early age to get a good foundation.

Cody said two-thirds of the schools in Louisiana provide 5½ hours of instruction per day and one-third offers the national average of six hours a day.

He said that children who receive 5½ hours of instruction per day lose a full year of instructional time during their 12 years of education.

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He also recommended that very young children who are likely candidates to have deficiencies and that such children would be encouraged to stay in school.

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Cody said the Department of Education introduced bills that would have increased the length of the school year by two or three days. While the idea was accepted favorably by the House Education Committee, no funds were tied to the effort — and the proposals did not earn House or Senate approval.

Adding the two or three days would cost the state between $10 and $15 million, Cody said.

Cody said his goal is to increase the school year from 180 to 200 school days within 10 years.

"I would hope to see next year both legislation and appropriation increases introduced that would start the process of adding two or three days to the school year," Cody said after the speech. "I think the state will need to continue to increase the school year during the recently ended legislative session, but lawmakers would not go along with the idea."

"Increasingly school districts are doing that on their own, and we certainly encourage local school systems making the choices on their own," Cody said. "I think in the near future, either next year or the year thereafter, I think a minimum of six hours of instructional day become state policy. It may be necessary to tie that also to state funds, but I think that would be money well spent."

In addition to increasing elementary and secondary education students' instructional time each day and each year, Cody said the state must effectively use technology as a learning tool. And, he said, the state must implement programs to teach parents how to properly work to develop their children's skills better at an early age.

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compensation for classroom teacher salaries and that in future years some portion of that should be addressed also to more days for students.

"If we could get up to 200 days in the next 10 years, I think would be a significant accomplishment."

Also included in the package was an increase in the length of the school day, Cody said. "I think a minimum of six hours of instructional day become state policy. It may be necessary to tie that also to state funds, but I think that would be money well spent."

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